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SUBJECT: Senegal: Can President Abdoulaye Wade's new alliance win next presidential elections?

11. (SBU) Summary: On November 21, President Abdoulaye Wade announced the creation of a new alliance called "SOPI pour demain" (Change for Tomorrow). Four days earlier, he ended a host of rumors by declaring at a press conference that he will not call early elections nor eliminate a second round runoff. In a separate statement, a senior political advisor to the President underlined the stakes when he told a gathering of party leaders, "If Wade does not win in 2012, most of us will end up in jail." End Summary.

Ending rumors  
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12. (SBU) On November 17, President Wade told journalists at a press conference that he had no intention of calling early presidential elections, currently scheduled for February 2012. He said "this was a dream of the opposition" arguing that his party is governing without difficulty and that the National Assembly is functioning as it should. Commenting about rumors that he wants to eliminate a second runoff he said "I have the power to do it, but I do not plan to, there are no circumstances that warrant it." (Comment: While calling early elections is not in his interest, given the need to rebuild his waning popularity in the wake of his party's defeat in the March local elections, Wade may yet be tempted to eliminate the runoff. If one reads his statements carefully he did not completely rule the notion out. Moreover, Wade he knows that it's going to be much harder this time around for him to win a runoff, especially without the support of popular former Prime Minister and fundraiser extraordinaire Macky Sall. Sall's party is loosely affiliated with the Benno coalition of opposition parties and Sall is close to former Prime Minister Moustapha Niasse who has made it his life's mission to oust Wade. End Comment.)

Victory or Jail  
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13. (SBU) On November 20, Serigne Mbacke Ndiaye, President Wade's Political Advisor, dramatically told the senior leadership of the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) and allied parties, "if Wade is not reelected in 2012, most of us will end up in jail." Beyond the stalwarts who have been in the PDS since its inception, the party is home to a large number of senior political figures from the opposition or allied parties who only joined the PDS to have access positions of power. The competition among these leaders has paralyzed the party as the PDS can neither seem to renew itself by nurturing leaders at the grassroots levels nor organize a congress for fear of unleashing a leadership battle royal. Meanwhile, leaders who feel marginalized often order their followers to vote against the PDS.

A Weak Alliance  
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14. (SBU) According to a Mouride Deputy at the National Assembly, "Wade wishes to solidify his ranks; that is why he created the Alliance SOPI for Tomorrow." The Alliance brings together dozens of minuscule political parties; in his view, the President's goal,

beyond being able to claim he has a large alliance supporting his reelection, is to end divisions in his party. A young PDS leader at the Assembly told Embassy that the Alliance is a new approach to end the competition between rival factions who are vying for the President's attention at the expense of the vitality of the party. Both PDS leaders note that Wade is showing a more magnanimous leadership style by inviting these figures to air their views. They added that the Alliance will elect a unified Directorate that will have the goal of maintaining "serenity" in the PDS. Reflecting on the complex leadership situation within PDS, the Mouride Deputy noted "we have to get Wade reelected and then we'll see where we go from there."

15. (SBU) COMMENT: With the creation of the SOPI Alliance, President Wade has launched his electoral campaign, a fact reflected by a recently approved three-year investment plan which foresees the construction of high-cost high visibility projects such as roads, bridges, and national and regional airports. Programs such as the unionizations of farmers and the creation of a Green Bank to fund farming projects are also part of his offensive to win votes in rural areas. Wade won in 2000 with the SOPI slogan and hopes to win again in 2012 with almost the same slogan, SOPI for Tomorrow. However, considering the unpopularity of his government, he will have to go way beyond fancy rhetoric and placating his party's leadership to win back the hearts and minds of a disillusioned electorate. End Comment.  
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